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**REASON & REVELATION**

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# GENESIS: MYTH or HISTORY?

Could  
**JESUS**  
Have  
**Sinned?**

## THE FIRST BOOK OF MOSES, CALLED GENESIS.

### CHAP. 1.

1 The creation of heaven and earth, 3 of the light, 6 of the firmament, 9 of the earth separated from the waters, 11 and made fruitful, 14 of the sun, moon, and stars, 20 of fish and fowl, 24 of beasts and cattle, 26 of man in the image of God. 29 Also the appointment of food.

**I**N the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

2 And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

3 And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.

4 And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness.

5 And God called the light Day, and the darkness Night: and the evening

17 And God set them in the heaven to give light upon the earth.

18 And to rule over the day and the night, and to divide the light from the darkness: and God saw that it was good.

19 And the evening and the morning were the fourth day.

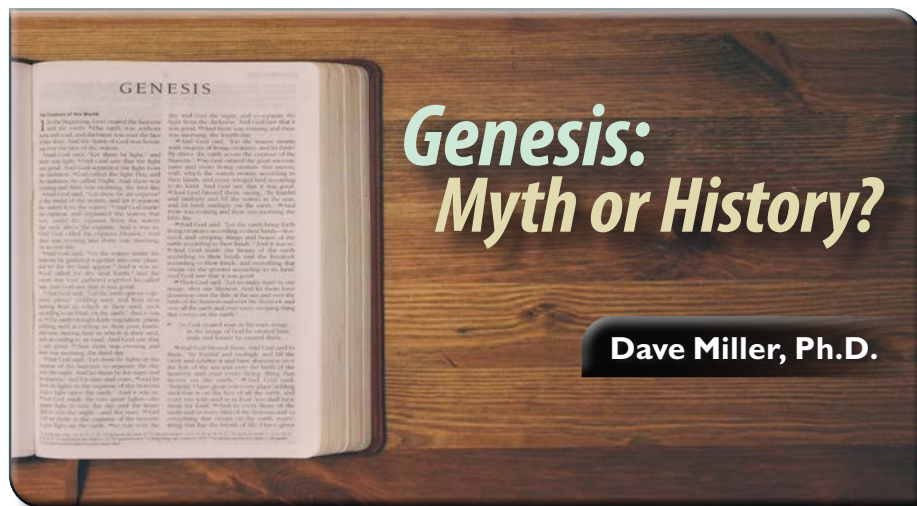
20 And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the living creature in the open waters.

21 And God

"Don't  
**Quarantine**  
Yourself from  
**Spiritual**  
Nourishment!"

**40**  
YEARS





### Article In Brief...

**The authority of the biblical text in general, and the book of Genesis in particular, has been significantly undermined in the mind of the average American, especially in the last half century+. Despite the thorough permeation of the scientific community by belief in organic evolution, and despite its widespread acceptance by recent generations of Americans who have been indoctrinated by liberal public education, nevertheless, the Bible speaks decisively regarding the historicity of the origins of the Universe and human beings. Since the Bible can be shown to be the inspired Word of God, its repudiation of the notion that the Genesis account may be characterized as “myth” is paramount and conclusive. A failure to take Genesis at face value can easily undermine confidence in the rest of the Bible.**

**W**HAT do we mean by “myth”? German theologian Rudolf Bultmann popularized the notion that, in order to properly interpret the text, the New Testament must be stripped of those elements that appear to be “mythical,” specifically, its supernatural features.<sup>1</sup> “Myth,” therefore, in theological circles refers to a traditional, non-literal story in a particular culture that manifests that culture’s worldview. The story serves as a vehicle to convey a truth, without necessarily being historically true. The Bible’s depictions of heaven, hell, demons, evil spirits,

and Satan are viewed as symbols for deeper meanings rather than being literally existent. Many theologians, and now many Americans, insist that the Bible is a pre-scientific document that is riddled with the errors that accompanied early man’s quest for knowledge, making many of its claims “mythical.”

Along with the onset of modern scientific discovery and understanding has come a widespread tendency to compromise the biblical text of Genesis 1-11. Otherwise conservative thinking Christians have not been immune to this deadly cancer

that ultimately undermines the entire Bible and one’s ability to arrive at the truth. In the 1980s, it was discovered that raw evolution was being taught by two Abilene Christian University professors. One of the biology professors provided his class with a handout that included a photocopy of the first page of Genesis. In the margin he scrawled the words, “Hymn, myth.”<sup>2</sup> Concerned about the backlash from its base, the university mobilized in an attempt to discredit the charge and sweep it under the proverbial carpet, but the evidence was decisive, as acknowledged even by objective outsiders as well as a Master’s thesis conducted 30 years later.<sup>3</sup> The fact is that evolution has been taught on other Christian college campuses as well. The lack of outcry testifies to the fact that even Christians and their children have been adversely influenced by secular education.

It is amazing, even shocking, to see the extent to which the authority of the biblical text in general, and the book of Genesis in particular, has been undermined in the mind of the average American, especially in the last half century or so. In virtually every corner of our country, relaxed and compromised views of the Bible prevail—even among otherwise conservative Americans and those who profess to be Christian. Before leaving office, President Bush (“W”) was interviewed by Cynthia McFadden on ABC’s “Nightline.” When asked if he believed the Bible to be literally true, he responded: “You know. Probably not.... No, I’m not a literalist, but I think you can learn a lot from it, but I do think that the New Testament for example is...has got... You know, the important lesson is ‘God sent a son.’”<sup>4</sup> When asked about creation and evolution, Bush said:

I think you can have both. I think evolution can—you’re getting me way out of my lane here. I’m just a

simple president. But it's, I think that God created the earth, created the world; I think the creation of the world is so mysterious it requires something as large as an Almighty and I don't think it's incompatible with the scientific proof that there is evolution.<sup>5</sup>

Myriad instances could be cited in which Americans manifest the degrading effects of skepticism, atheism, evolution, and liberal theology.

What a far cry from most of America's history. It is hard to believe that—up until the 1960s—American education was thoroughly saturated with the biblical account of Creation.<sup>6</sup> The book of Genesis was taken as a straight-forward account of the formation of the Universe and the beginning of human history. People took God at His Word. Though liberal theology swept through Europe in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, which included attacks on the verbal, inerrant inspiration of the Scriptures, and though the Creation account began to be openly challenged at the 1925 Scopes trial in Dayton, Tennessee, still, the majority of Americans continued to accept the biblical account right on up to World War II. Since then, however, sinister forces have been chipping away at belief in the inspiration and integrity of the Bible. They have succeeded in eroding confidence in its trustworthiness and authority.

But there are no excuses. The evidence is available, and it is overwhelming. No one can stand before God at the end of time and justify himself for his rejection of Genesis as a straightforward record of literal history. Failure to take Genesis at face value can easily result in acceptance of views and/or practices that will jeopardize one's standing with God.

## NEW TESTAMENT PROOF THAT GENESIS IS LITERAL HISTORY

**I**f we had no other means by which to determine whether Genesis is myth or history, the New Testament alone is ample proof. Depending on how one calculates the material, the New Testament has at least 60 allusions to Genesis 1-11, with over 100 allusions to the entire book.<sup>7</sup> Jesus and the writers of the New Testament consistently treated Genesis as literal history. As a matter of fact, every New Testament author refers to Genesis, and nearly every New Testament book does as well. Their handling of the Genesis text demonstrates that they considered the events to have actually occurred, rather than being mythical or legendary folklore that merely contains useful lessons.

### Jesus

Consider a sampling of allusions made by Jesus:

- He specified the foundation of the marriage institution, quoting Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 as historical precedent and proof that *carte blanche* divorce is unacceptable to God (Matthew 19:4-5; Mark 10:6-

8). Did He mean to ground marriage on fairytales?

- Jesus mentioned Abel as a real person whose blood was shed on account of his righteous behavior, just like other historical personages in human history (Matthew 23:35). If Abel was not an actual person who lived on Earth, neither was Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom Jesus said the Jews “murdered between the Temple and the altar”—an actual physical location.
- Jesus declared Satan to be a “murderer from the beginning” and the father of lies—referring to the Fall (John 8:44; Genesis 3:4,19; cf. Romans 5:12; 1 John 3:8).
- Jesus referenced Moses' writings as genuine representations of history (John 5:46), even warning, “But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?” (vs. 47).
- Jesus spoke of the “days of Noah” and the Flood as an actual historical event that has many parallels to the future coming of the Son of Man in terms of what people will be doing with their time (Matthew 24:37-39).
- Jesus compared Capernaum to Sodom (Genesis 18-19), saying, “for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained

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until this day. But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you” (Matthew 11:23-24). Sodom would have had to have been an actual city for it to “have remained until this day” and for it to fare more tolerably in the Day of Judgment (cf. 10:15).

- The genealogical lists of Jesus’ physical lineage identify actual historical persons in the first century all the way back to persons originally named in Genesis, including Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, and Tamar (Matthew 1:1-2), as well as Adam, Seth, Enoch, and Noah (Luke 3:36-37).

## Paul

Paul, likewise, treated persons, places, and incidents in Genesis as if historically real. Here is a sampling of some of his allusions:

- He quoted Genesis 1:3 to note how God caused light to shine out of darkness (2 Corinthians 4:6).
- Quoting Genesis 2:7, Paul said Adam was the **first** human being on Earth (1 Corinthians 15:45).
- He claimed that Adam was made from dust (1 Corinthians 15:47)—as Genesis records.
- He noted how the woman is “from” (*ek*—“out of”) man (1 Corinthians 11:8,12), referring to the fact that Eve was literally taken **out of** Adam’s body.
- Paul quoted Genesis 2:24 to verify how a man and woman “become one flesh” (1 Corinthians 6:16), comparing marriage to the church (Ephesians 5:31).
- Adam was as historically real as Christ and Moses, having introduced sin into the world, causing death to reign during the historical interval “from Adam to Moses” (Romans 5:14-15).
- Paul identified Adam and Eve by name, noting that Adam was created **before** the woman was created, and also noting the deception to which Eve succumbed (1 Timothy 2:13-14), which occurred via the “serpent” (2 Corinthians 11:3).
- Paul claimed that God’s deity and attributes have been evident “since

the creation of the world” (Romans 1:20).

- Paul said that Jesus fulfilled the promises that had been made to “the fathers,” i.e., Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Romans 15:8).
- Paul quoted the promise God made to Abraham concerning Sarah giving birth to Isaac (Romans 9:9), and also mentions Jacob, Esau, and Rebecca by name (vss. 9-10).

## Peter

Peter, too, endorsed the historicity of Genesis:

- He alluded to the watery mass at Creation from Genesis 1:12,6-7,9 (2 Peter 3:5).
- He regarded the Flood as an actual historical event, mentioning Noah by name and specifying the number of survivors as eight, and the Flood’s extent being global (1 Peter 3:20; 2 Peter 2:5; 3:6).
- Peter believed in the historical personage of Lot (Genesis 11-14,19) and that God actually turned “the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes” to make them “an example to those who afterward would live ungodly.” The incident also serves the purpose of demonstrating how God “knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations” (2 Peter 2:6-9). If the incident was not historical, it would serve no legitimate parallel purpose.
- Peter also noted the actual, historical relationship sustained by Sarah and Abraham (1 Peter 3:6).

## Hebrews

The writer of the Hebrews letter bases his entire argument on the historicity of Genesis and the Old Testament system:

- His quotation of Psalm 102 includes the fact that even as God created the heavens and the Earth, so they will perish (1:10). Both circumstances require literal historicity.
- Alluding to the fact that God “finished” His creative activities—a direct allusion to Genesis 2:1—he then quotes Genesis 2:2 to call attention to the literal cessation of God’s actions on the seventh day

of the week (4:3-4; cf. vs. 10—“as God did from His”).

- The comparison of Christ to Melchizedek (Genesis 14:18) in contrast with Aaron demands that both of these figures were actual historical personages (5:1-10; 6:20; 7:1-21).
- God’s promise to Abraham in Genesis 22:17 was a literal promise to a literal person (6:13-14).
- God’s creation of the Universe was by His “word” (11:3)—even as the Genesis record indicates that God spoke the created order into existence (“God said...”—1:3,6,9,11,14,20,24,26).
- Hebrews chapter 11 is a veritable “Who’s Who” of historical personalities from Genesis whose historicity is assumed: Cain and Abel (vs. 4), Enoch (vs. 5), Noah (vs. 7), Abraham (vss. 8-10), Sarah (vss. 11-12, who literally produced a multitude of descendants), Isaac (vss. 17-20), Jacob (vss. 20-21), and Joseph (vs. 22).
- Esau sold his birthright for food (12:16).
- Abel’s shed blood is as historically real as Christ’s (12:24).

## Other New Testament Writers

The other writers show the same respect for bona fide history portrayed in Genesis. James refers to Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac (2:21). Jude mentions Cain, Enoch, and Sodom and Gomorrah (vss. 7,11,14). He draws a comparison between the physical destruction of the cities with “the vengeance of eternal fire” that awaits the disobedient at the Judgment. John notes that Cain murdered his brother because of his own sinful actions (1 John 3:12). Even the book of Revelation, though highly figurative, nevertheless contains numerous allusions to Genesis that indicate an historical understanding of the book (e.g., 5:5; 10:6; 20:2; 22:2). To suggest that the book of Genesis is a compilation of interesting fables, myths, folklore, popular anecdotes, and stories, rather than actual history, is to suggest that the doctrines

of Christianity are rooted in and dependent on fairytales and imaginary stories. Indeed, if the events of Genesis did not historically occur, the New Testament writers—and Jesus Himself—were either in error or flat out liars, since they unquestionably referred to the events of Genesis as being historically true.

### LINGUISTIC PROOF THAT GENESIS IS LITERAL HISTORY

**I**n addition to the New Testament's inspired treatment of Genesis as an actual account of history, one could also simply examine the literary genre of Genesis. Many in our day insist that Genesis should not be read as literal history because it is written in poetic form and is not a literal description of actual events. But such a claim is, itself, linguistic gobbledygook. Written language, whether from man or God, can be deciphered in terms of its genre. One can identify the author's use of linguistic elements and extract intended meaning from the words that are used. In other words, though the 50 chapters of Genesis contain figurative language—as does the entire Bible—nevertheless, one can easily distinguish between the literal and the figurative.

Entire volumes have been written on human communication, how human language functions, and how to derive meaning from written language. Many books have been produced that expound the discipline of hermeneutics—the process of interpreting language. These volumes provide self-evident, easily discernible rules and procedures for detecting figurative language. D.R. Dungan's classic work, *Hermeneutics*, written in 1888, contains chapters on "Figurative Language," "The Various Figures of the Bible," and "Figures of Thought."<sup>8</sup> Clinton Lockhart's 1901 volume *Principles of Interpretation* contains chapters on "Figurative


Language," "Poetry," and "Types."<sup>9</sup> Christendom has produced many books that demonstrate the means by which biblical language may be understood, including Bernard Ramm's *Hermeneutics* and Milton Terry's 1883 volume *Biblical Hermeneutics*.<sup>10</sup> Ascertaining whether Genesis and, specifically, the Creation account are "poetic," "hymn," or "myth" is not a matter of confusion or uncertainty—except for those who have an agenda and wish to concoct an elaborate smokescreen to avoid the obvious import of God's Word.

Does Genesis 1 contain any figurative language? Certainly. But not anything that makes the chapter non-literal in its basic import. For example, the term "face" in Genesis 1:2, which is actually plural in the Hebrew (*pah-neem*—"faces"), is an idiomatic instance of *pleonasm*, a form of *amplificatio*, in which more words are used than the grammar requires: "And darkness was upon the faces of the deep." The noun "deep" (which, itself, is a figurative term for the sea or ocean) is enhanced or emphasized by means of a second, redundant noun "faces." Instead of

simply saying, "darkness was upon the deep," adding "faces" makes the statement "much more forcible and emphatic."<sup>11</sup> The use of "saw" in Genesis 1:4,10,12,18,21,25 is the figure of speech known as *anthropopatheia* in which human attributes are ascribed to God—specifically in this text, human actions.<sup>12</sup> The expression in 1:9,10, "Let the dry appear," is the figure of speech known as *antimereia*, the exchange of one part of speech for another, in this case, an adjective for a noun. "Dry" in the verses refers to the "land."<sup>13</sup> Genesis 1:11 uses *polyptoton* in which the same part of speech is repeated in a different inflection. Specifically, the verb "seeding" is repeated by means of its cognate noun "seed": "Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed," literally, "seeding seed."<sup>14</sup> In other words, vegetation was created by God in a state of bearing seed, and not vice versa—which militates against the notion of evolution and underscores the instantaneous nature of the Creation. Indeed, this **figurative** language testifies to the **literal** nature of the Creation week.

(cont. on p. 56)

## SPEAKING SCHEDULES



A number of AP seminars have been cancelled due to the COVID outbreak. However, some churches are opting to stream our speakers into member homes. Others are posting presentations of our seminars on their Web pages and Facebook pages. See the AP Web site for videos that may be viewed, as well as the Apologetics Press Youtube page.



# “Don’t Quarantine Yourself from Spiritual Nourishment!”

As our nation experiences the occurrence of a threatening virus and the unusual call for everyone to quarantine themselves from social gatherings—including worship services—Christians need to be reminded not to distance themselves from ongoing spiritual nourishment. The Web site of Apologetics Press is loaded with a variety of enriching materials to maintain one’s spiritual health.

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## **2** Key Word/Topical Search Engine

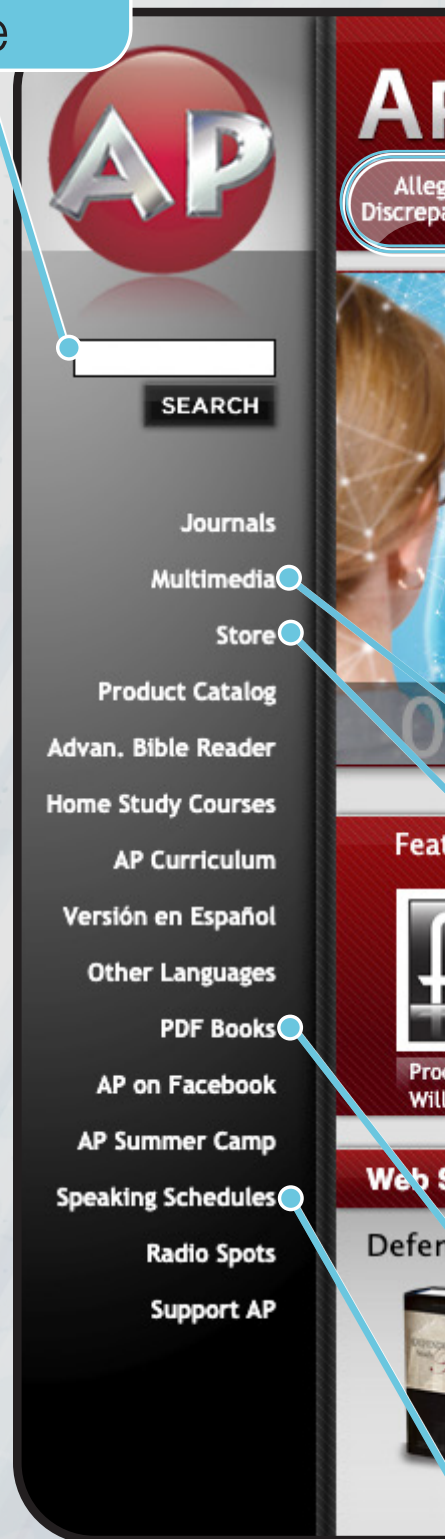
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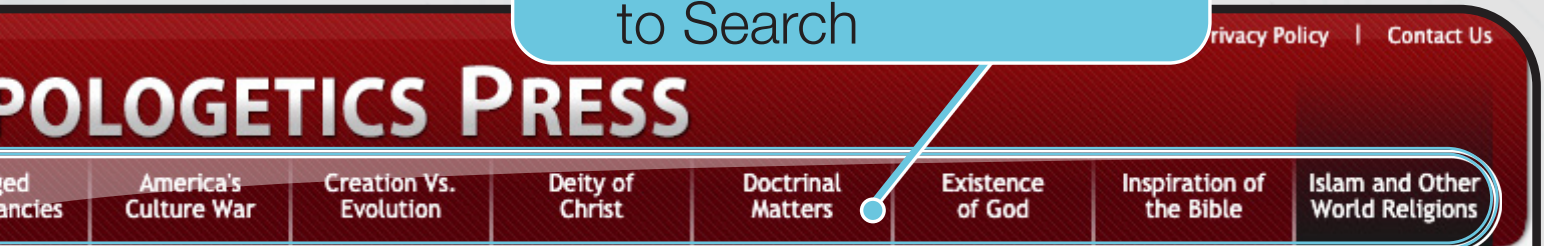
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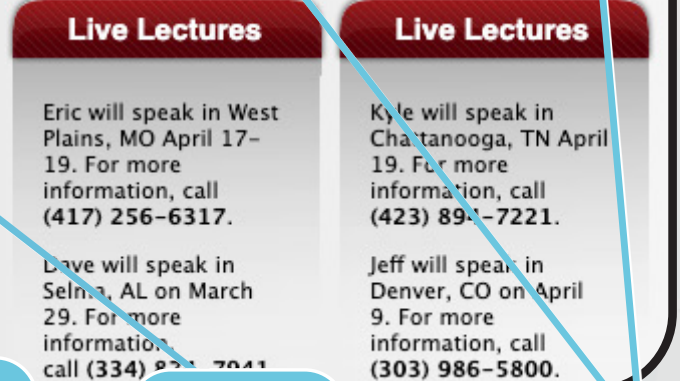
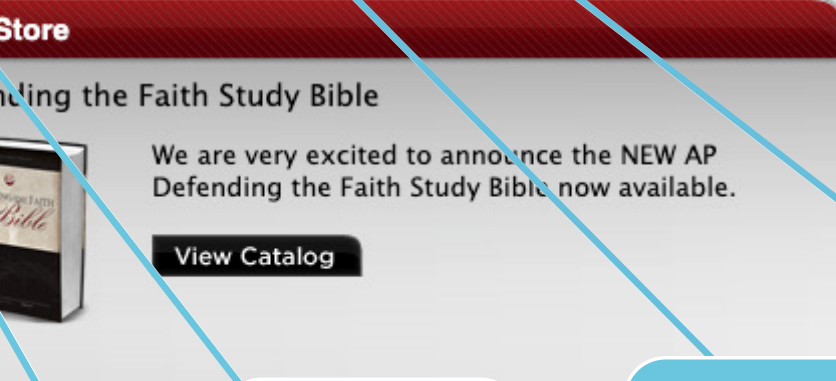
# 1 Eight Main Categories to Search



01

It cost the British government about 1.8 million dollars. British scientists call it the first artificial stomach ever made. Commercial food companies are looking to it for help. Dr. Marin Wickham holds the patent on this amazing contraption.

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So, yes, Genesis 1 (and perhaps every other chapter in the Bible) contains figurative language, as does our everyday language.<sup>15</sup> **But that language is detectable, discernible, and decipherable**—and does not necessarily imply that the overall message being conveyed is not to be taken literally. None of the language of Genesis 1 even hints that the events described were imaginary as opposed to being actual historical occurrences. In fact, simply take your Bible and turn to Genesis chapter 1 and notice how many terms are used that have an obvious, undisputable literal import, including “earth,” “darkness,” “Spirit of God,” “waters,” “light,” “day,” “night,” “evening,” “morning,” “first,” “seas,” “grass,” “herb,” “seed,” “fruit,” “tree,” “seasons,” “years,” “stars,” “fowl,” “fish,” “cattle,” etc. Distinguishing between figurative and literal language is not that difficult. As a side note, Steven Boyd conducted a statistical analysis using logistic regression, in order to ascertain whether Genesis 1:1-2:3 is Hebrew poetry or historical narrative. He concluded: “The biblical creation account clearly is not poetry but instead is a literal description in real time of supernatural events.”<sup>16</sup>

### CORROBORATION BY OTHER BIBLE PASSAGES

**I**f the events described in the book of Genesis were not intended to be understood as literal history, one would expect the rest of the Bible to give some indication of that fact. Yet, on the contrary, several passages scattered from the Old Testament to the New Testament allude to the events in such a way that their historicity is assumed. Take, for example, specific verses regarding the creation of the Universe by God. The distinct impression is given in Genesis chapter 1 that God orally **spoke** everything into existence, rather than using

some naturalistic, time-laden process. In what is obviously an actual historical setting, reported to us in a literal context of Scripture, Moses informs the Israelites situated at the base of Mt. Sinai—

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work.... For **in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them**, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it (Exodus 20:8-11).

No Israelite listening to this declaration in 1500 B.C. would have ever conceived the notion that God created everything in the Universe over a period of millions and billions of years. The correlation between the days of Genesis 1 and the six-day work week enjoined upon people under the Law of Moses would have been unmistakable and could have been understood in no other way but literally.

Another example is seen in Psalm 33—which is certainly written in standard Hebrew metrical verse—but poetry that conveys literal truth. Speaking of God’s creative powers, David declared:

**By the word of the LORD** the heavens were made, and all the host of them **by the breath of His mouth**. He gathers the waters of the sea together as a heap; He lays up the deep in storehouses. Let all the earth fear the LORD; Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him. For **He spoke**, and it was done; **He commanded**, and it stood fast (Psalm 33:6-9).

The figurative elements of this poetic passage are seen in the notions of “breath” and “mouth”—physical attributes that would not literally, physically characterize God Who is

“spirit” (John 4:24; cf. Luke 24:39). But the oral aspect of God speaking the physical realm into existence is literal, even as God literally and audibly spoke to people throughout history (e.g., Genesis 12:1ff.; 22:12; Exodus 3:4ff.; Matthew 3:17; 17:5).

Still another example is seen in the psalmist’s call for praise by inanimate creation:

Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD from the heavens; Praise Him in the heights! Praise Him, all His angels; Praise Him, all His hosts! Praise Him, sun and moon; Praise Him, all you stars of light! Praise Him, you heavens of heavens, and you waters above the heavens! (Psalm 148:1-4).

Here is an excellent instance of figurative language. Obviously, the Sun, Moon, stars, and waters cannot literally, audibly praise God. Yet, having been created by God, they reflect their Maker. They manifest attributes that demonstrate their divine origin (cf. Psalm 19:1ff.). Hence, the next verse declares: “Let them praise the name of the LORD, **for He commanded and they were created**” (vs. 5). Here is yet another forthright indication that the impression projected by the Genesis account, that God literally spoke the Universe into existence, is an accurate impression, in spite of the fact that in Psalm 148 this truth is couched in figurative language.

We must ever remember that the Bible is unlike any other book on the planet. It reflects its own divine origin by the attributes that it possesses. It does not divulge its divine message in a sterile vacuum in which a writer expounds lofty ideals, or by means of a listing of ethical “do’s and don’ts.” Rather, by means of the Bible, God conveys His message to mankind **in history**.<sup>17</sup> We are introduced to the beginning of the Universe, the beginning of the human race, and thereafter we are treated to a sequen-



tial, historical narrative that guides us through 4,000 years of human history, climaxing with God's own personal visit to the Earth. This is all history! And it is clearly intended to be understood **literally**.

## CONCLUSION

**T**HE book of Genesis explains the Creation of the Universe, the corruption of humanity by sin, the catastrophe of the global Flood, and the confusion at Babel. Amazingly, it provides the foundation for anthropology, biology, astronomy, geology, and a host of other disciplines. Critical doctrines that impact all of humanity are rooted in the events described in Genesis, including the necessity of clothing—human modesty—and why we organize our lives in terms of a seven-day week. More crucial doctrines that pertain to eternity are also approached early on, including why humans sin, why humans die, and why Jesus would have to die on the cross. The very meaning of human existence is clarified by examining the book of Genesis.

Read carefully to Charles Darwin's autobiographical statement regarding the shift that occurred in his thinking that led to his belief in evolution: "I had gradually come, by this time, to see that the Old Testament from its manifestly false history of the world and from its attributing to God the feelings of a revengeful tyrant, was no more to be trusted than the sacred books of the Hindoos, or the beliefs of any barbarian."<sup>18</sup> The integrity of the entire Bible is seriously undermined when anyone compromises the literal, historical nature of the book of Genesis, with its critical teaching on origins. Obstinate clinging to evolution, theistic or otherwise, and stubbornly insisting on a relaxed, devalued interpretation of Genesis, can only end in a diluted religion.

May we love God. May we love His Word. May we defend it against all efforts to destroy its integrity and message. May we pore over its contents—as if our lives, the lives of our family, and the lives of those we influence **depend** upon it. For, indeed, they do.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Bultmann (1958), *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons).

<sup>2</sup> *Is Genesis Myth?* (Montgomery, AL: Apologetics Press), p. 16. Wayne Jackson (1986), "The Teaching of Evolution at Abilene Christian University," *Christian Courier*, 21[9]:33-35, January.

<sup>3</sup> tute for Creation Research conducted a seminar on the campus of Abilene Christian University in the wake of the adamant denial of school authorities that their professors believed in evolution or an old Earth. He subsequently reported: "No tendency toward the teaching of organic evolution was encountered during the meetings, **but it was obvious that several of the science professors held the old-earth position.**" See Henry Morris, ed. (1987), "Abilene Christian University Sponsors Seminar on Creation and Age of the Earth," *Acts & Facts*, 16[5]:4, May. Further, in his Master's thesis written 30 years after the fact via an extensive use of primary sources, Paul Anthony engaged in an extensive investigation of the controversy and concluded: "[T]he evidence makes clear that Archie Manis and Ken Williams were indeed teaching evolution in their classes as an explanatory framework for most of the world's diversity in plants and animals. They rejected young-earth creationism and denied that such an idea could be proven scientifically. And they accepted the basic concepts of evolution, such as natural selection and genetic mutation, as beyond dispute. Regardless of whether either man accepted fully the Darwinian system of all life's descent from a single common ancestor, there is little doubt that when Bert Thompson accused them of teaching evolution without refutation—especially given that ACU never disputed the vast majority of the evidence he presented—he was correct in the basic facts of his allegations, notwithstand-

ing either the university's denials or his own acerbic style." From Paul Anthony (2016), "Untruths and Propaganda"—*Churches of Christ, Darwinism, and the 1985-1986 ACU Evolution Controversy*, Digital Commons @ ACU, Electronic Theses and Dissertations, Paper 8, p. 127.

<sup>4</sup> ible' With Evolution" (2008), *Fox News*, December 9, <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2008/12/09/bush-says-creation-incompatible-evolution#ixzz1OWvPq9Ma>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> *New England Primer* (1805), pp. 31-32, <http://public.gettysburg.edu/~tshannon/his341/nep1805contents.html>; Noah Webster (1857), *The Elementary Spelling Book* (New York, NY: American Book Company), p. 29.

<sup>7</sup> esis in the New Testament," Creation Ministries International, <http://creation.com/genesis-new-testament>.

<sup>8</sup> *Hermeneutics* (Delight, AR: Gospel Light), pp. 195-369.

<sup>9</sup> *Principles of Interpretation* (Delight, AR: Gospel Light), revised edition, pp. 156-197, 222-228.

<sup>10</sup> *Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker); Milton Terry (no date), *Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), reprint.

<sup>11</sup> *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1968 reprint), p. 406.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 888.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 495.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 275.

<sup>15</sup> monly used and immediately understood virtually without thought include: "he's on the phone," "she's under the gun," "keep your eyes peeled," "you drive me up the wall," "he threw me a curve," "I'm feeling blue," "I need to stretch my legs," "shoot the breeze," "did you catch that," etc.

<sup>16</sup> ing of Genesis 1:1-2:3," in Don DeYoung, *Thousands...Not Billions* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books), p. 168.

<sup>17</sup> *Christianity: A Clear Case of History!* (West Monroe, LA: Howard Book House).

<sup>18</sup> *The Autobiography of Charles Darwin 1809-1882 with Original Omissions Restored* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World), pp. 85-86.

# Could Jesus Have Sinned?

Kyle Butt, M.Div.



LET us not pretend that we will ever truly understand how Jesus came to Earth in the flesh and was, at the same time, both 100% human and 100% God. Such thoughts are too wonderful for us and beyond our capacity to fully comprehend. Yet, even though we cannot know all that was involved in Jesus' incarnation, the Bible gives us enough information to understand certain aspects of it. One key aspect of Jesus' character while on Earth was the fact that He was sinless, completely and entirely innocent of any wrongdoing. The inspired apostle Peter explained that Christ showed us the perfect example, "that you should follow in His steps: Who **committed no sin**, nor was guile found in His mouth" (1 Peter 2:22).<sup>1</sup> Just one chapter earlier, Peter explained that Jesus' sacrificial blood was that of "a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1:19). The Hebrews writer emphasized the fact that Jesus "was in all points tempted as we are, **yet without sin**" (Hebrews 4:15).

Often, to summarize this idea of sinlessness, Jesus is described as being perfect. The idea of perfection, however, carries some baggage with it that the biblical text does not

include. When many of us think of the word "perfect," we imagine a person who does not make any mistakes. A baseball pitcher may pitch a perfect game. A professional bowler may achieve a perfect score. A football quarterback may play a game in which he connects with his receivers on every pass. Such perfection, how-

*"For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin."*

Hebrews 4:15

ever, is not how the Bible describes Jesus. Jesus' perfection would not have meant that if He played a game of basketball, then He would have made every shot He took. It would not suggest that He never fell down when learning to walk, or that He never made an errant cut on the boards He worked with as a carpenter. Jesus was (and is) **morally** perfect

and sinless, but His time on Earth would have included cuts, bruises, scrapes, falls, and less than perfect attempts at childhood games He may have played.

In view of Jesus being "perfect," some have suggested His perfection would extend to the idea that He **could not sin**. The thought is that, if Jesus as God in the flesh was perfect, it would be impossible for God to sin, because that would violate His nature (Habakkuk 1:13). This line of thought admits that Jesus truly was tempted, but that at no point could He have actually sinned by giving in to the temptation. Was it possible for Jesus to sin in the same way humans choose to sin, or was His nature while on Earth such that it was **impossible** for Him to sin?

## CHRIST EMPTIED HIMSELF

THE Bible clearly explains that God cannot be tempted (James 1:13). Yet the text just as clearly and boldly proclaims that Jesus was tempted in all ways like humans (Hebrews 4:15). What do we do with such seemingly contradictory statements? If Jesus is God, and God cannot be tempted, then Jesus cannot be tempted. Jesus is God, yet He was tempted, so where does that leave us? The answer can be found in Philippians 2:7, where the Bible explains that Christ "emptied Himself" (KJV) or "made Himself of no reputation" (NKJV), "coming in the likeness of men." All that this entails cannot be understood, but it extends to the fact that somehow Jesus kept the nature of God, but put Himself in a subordinated position to the Father, and at the same time took the "likeness" of humanity.<sup>2</sup> Jesus was God, but at the same time could be tempted. This situation would extend to other concepts that would be "impossible" for God, but not for Jesus during



His time on Earth. Luke explains that Jesus grew in wisdom (Luke 2:52). Yet, an all-knowing God cannot grow in wisdom, since He has possessed it from before time began (Proverbs 8:22-23). Titus explains that God “cannot lie” (Titus 1:2). Christ, in His emptied “likeness-of-man” state, however, would be able to lie, just as He could be tempted and needed to grow in wisdom. By taking on the likeness of man, Jesus opened Himself up to the real possibility to sin.

### TEMPTED IN ALL WAYS AS WE ARE

**T**HE writer of Hebrews explicitly stated that Jesus “was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin” (4:15). If Jesus really did not have the capability to sin, how would this provide any comfort, hope, or encouragement to sinful humans? Humans have the ability to make the correct choice when they are tempted. God never allows us to be tempted beyond what we are capable of handling, and He always provides a way of escape (1 Corinthians 10:13). It is theoretically possible for humans to live sinless lives. We all know, however, that none of us has achieved that goal (Romans 3:23). At some point in our lives, we have chosen to sin. For Jesus’ temptation to be “in all points” like ours, He must have had the capability to choose sin, just as we do. Think of how hollow the statement in Hebrews would be if Jesus were incapable of sin. If He could not sin, then His temptation could not be like ours. To illustrate, imagine a boxer going up against the heavy weight world champion. His manager explains that this opponent can be beaten. The boxer asks how he knows. The manager tells his boxer that a previous fighter recently beat the opponent. As a side note, however, the manager explains that the

other guy who won had a magic force field that made it impossible for him to get hit at all. How much encouragement would that give the anxious fighter? When Satan tempted Jesus to turn stones into bread, Jesus had both the power necessary to actually turn the stones to bread, and the capability to choose the sin. Jesus could have turned the stones to bread, or jumped from the Temple, or bowed down to Satan. He simply chose not to yield to temptation (Matthew 4:1-10).

*“...who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.”*

*Philippians 2:6-7*

### SIN AND HUMAN NATURE

**I**T is common to hear the idea put forth that people are born with a “sinful human nature” and that humans cannot really keep from sinning. Supposedly, from the time of Adam and Eve’s Fall in the Garden of Eden, all humans born after the Fall have inherited some aspect of a corrupt human nature that is incapable of resisting all temptation. The problem with this concept is twofold. First, if Jesus came in the “likeness of man,” His nature would have contained some aspect of this corruption, since His human body was the combined product of the Holy Spirit and Mary. Second, the idea of a “corrupt” human nature

does not explain how sin entered the world. Adam and Eve did not have a sinful, corrupt nature. On the contrary, God created them “very good” (Genesis 1:31), yet they still chose to sin. The capacity God gave to the first humans to choose to obey God or to sin was “very good.” There is nothing inherently corrupt or bad with the capacity to sin. In theory, Adam could have chosen never to sin. He did not. That is why the apostle Paul explained that Christ, when He came to Earth, was the “second” Adam (Romans 5:12-21). Both Adam and Jesus had the capacity to sin. Both were tempted. Adam yielded to temptation and ushered in the Fall and death that resulted from sin entering the world. Jesus did not yield to sin, though He had that capacity. “Therefore, as through one man’s offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so **through one Man’s righteous act** the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life” (Romans 5:18). Adam could have resisted, but he didn’t. Jesus could have sinned, but He didn’t. Jesus provided the example of what Adam and all humans should have done, but what none of us choose to do. “Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted” (Hebrews 2:18). Praise God that our Savior never gave in to temptation!

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> All emphasis in Bible verses is added by the author unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> Tempted...But Jesus Was?” (2010), <http://apologeticspress.org/apPubPage.aspx?pub=1&issue=938&article=1389>.



## NOTE FROM *The Editor*



### “Don’t Quarantine Yourself from Spiritual Nourishment!”

As our nation experiences the occurrence of a threatening virus and the unusual call for everyone to quarantine themselves from social gatherings—including worship services—Christians need to be reminded not to distance themselves from ongoing spiritual nourishment. The Web site of Apologetics Press is loaded with a variety of enriching materials to maintain one’s spiritual health. In addition to a host of free articles, the site offers free access to both *Reason & Revelation* as well as our kids’ magazine *Discovery*. Also, the “Multimedia” section of our site contains a great many videos that may be viewed for free. What’s more, our “PDF Books” section has some 25 books that may be downloaded—also free of charge. We even offer a free Bible class curriculum. In the “Other Languages” section of our site, you

may access AP materials that have been translated into eight languages in addition to English. Further, we have an entire Web site that is packed with materials offered in Spanish. Simply click on “Versión en Español” on our home page. We also offer several study materials via our “Home Study Courses”—also listed on our home page. A variety of additional free resources are available as well. Although the physical safety of relatives, neighbors, and ourselves is of serious concern to us, let’s remember that our spiritual health, safety, and nourishment are of far more eternal importance.

**Dave Miller**



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for More Details